



Aruba's young equestrians to travel to the World Championships in Florida

The Directiva di Oranizacion Caballaro Arubano (DOCA) held the first of many fundraising events in the hopes of acquiring the finances needed to send young equestrians to the 6th CONFEPASO World Championships that will be held the first week of July in Kissimmee, Florida. CONFEPASO is a confederation of Paso Fino riders from The United States, Colombia, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, Aruba, and Curaçao. According to Juan Zuleta, an Internationally Certified Judge of the sport, there has been a renaissance in this classic riding style, and it has seen an enormous growth in popularity over the last ten years.

Aruba has had thirty-one young riders ranging in ages from four years old to twenty-four qualify to compete in the championships. In 2004 Aruba sent fourteen participants, of which seven made it to the finals, and Chayo Kock, only four years old at the time, brought home the gold medal in his division. This year, DOCA secretary Bernadette Henriquez, along with Juan Zuleta has great confidence that the team of young equestrians planning to participate will garner even more honors. On Sunday afternoon, attendees of a fun and fundraiser at the Monte Blanco Ranch in Moko had a chance to observe a number of the young riders as Juan put them through their paces.

The stringent requirements of Paso Fino riding is a mystery to the uninitiated. As Juan demonstrated on Sunday, the judges listen to the gate of the horse, which actually produces a very distinct pattern. Not only is there the classic Paso Fino gate, but also other melodic, percussive steps called "Trocha" and "Trote y Gallope," which must be produced in perfect pattern by horse and rider. The children will not compete with their own horses, but they will be paired with a mount by lottery and are given only a short time to get to know their partner in competition. It is an exciting and exacting test of horsemanship and the ability to establish a rapport with the animals.

Rancho Del Campo and Rancho Ponderosa also have a number of riders taking part in the competition, and over the next three months, a number of fundraising events will take place to enable them to send Aruba's team to Florida. There is also a raffle drive in conjunction with the Aruba Sports Union (ASU), selling tickets for some excellent prizes, and DOCA will have a booth on the Caya Betico Croes this Saturday, April 1st during the street fair in Oranjestad that will be honoring 200 years of the art of Hans Christian Anderson.

Aruba has many horseback riding enthusiasts, particularly of the Paso Fino discipline, and it is the hope of the board of DOCA to receive support from the community so that the island's youth may participate in this year's world championships and bring home the gold!